

First Congregational Church
("Old First Church")
Monument Avenue, on Bennington Green
at State Route 9, in "Old
Bennington" (originally Bennington
Center)
Bennington
Bennington County
Vermont

HABS No. VT-90

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PHOTOGRAPHS
WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Buildings Survey
National Park Service
Eastern Office, Design and Construction
143 South Third Street
Philadelphia, Pennsylvania

FIRST CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH ("OLD FIRST CHURCH")

Location: Monument Avenue, on Bennington Green at State Route 9, in "Old Bennington" (originally Bennington Center), Bennington, Bennington County, Vermont.

Present Owner and Occupant: First Congregational Church, Bennington, Vermont.

Present Use: Church.

Brief Statement of Significance: Extremely fine country church of the early nineteenth century.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History:

1. Original and subsequent owners: Always in possession of Church, 1806-1964 (present).
2. Date of erection: June 25, 1804 - January 1, 1806.
3. Architect: Lavius Fillmore.
4. Builder, suppliers: Asa Hyde, carver.
5. Notes on original plan and construction of building: Cost \$7,793.20.
6. Notes on known alterations and additions: Stoves introduced 1818; inside shutters added 1836; alterations 1849, 1851, 1864; bell installed 1820; restored 1936-37, Dennison Hall, architect, including rebuilding of box pews and high pulpit.

- B. Historical Events Connected with the Structure: Church founded 1762; affiliated with Congregational Church 1832; first meeting-house erected 1766; moved to new site in 1806. Reverend Jedidiah Dewey, first pastor. Ethan Allen, Revolutionary patriot, attended church here. Reverend Vincent Ravi-Booth, pastor of the church 1919-1944, was founder of Bennington College, and also was responsible for restoration of the church in 1936-37.

C. Sources of Information:

Congdon, Herbert Wheaton. Old Vermont Homes. New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1946. pp. 174-77.

Federal Writers' Project. Vermont: A Guide to the Green Mountain State. (American Guide Series) Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1937. p. 92.

The First Congregational Church of Bennington, Old Bennington, Vermont. Booklet. North Bennington, Vt.: River Road Press, n.d.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural Character: An extremely fine country church of the early nineteenth century.
2. Condition of fabric: Excellent.

B. Technical Description of Exterior:

1. Dimensions: Two stories plus three-stage tower; three-bay front by five bays; rectangular shape.
2. Foundations: Ashlar masonry.
3. Wall construction: Frame, clapboards, quoins at corners; painted white.
4. Structural system: Traditional frame structure.
5. Porches, stoops, bulkheads: None.
6. Chimneys: None observed.
7. Openings:

- a. Doorways and doors: Three front doors. The main entry in the center has a double door, three panels each, set in arch opening with broken pediment and fancy scrollwork fanlight. Modified Ionic pilasters flank this main door at each side. The two arch-head doors each have six panels and are set in simple frames with keystones.
- b. Windows and shutters: Large Palladian windows at second story (front center and rear center); three in first stage of tower. The Palladian opening over the main entry is set in a broken pediment. All first story windows are double-hung wooden sash, twelve-over-twelve lights, keystone arch lintels. Second-story windows have arch heads, are double-hung wooden sash, eight lights plus fan over twelve lights, and have simple frames with keystones.

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8. Roof:

- a. Shape: Gable roof.
- b. Cornice: Modillion cornice; pediment across front central projecting bay.
- c. Tower: Three-stage tower. First stage--square, clapboarded with four Palladian windows; second stage--octagonal with open arcade and Doric order (balustrade to first stage roof); third stage--octagonal, closed in, with large oval windows (placed vertically) with fancy scroll lights and Doric pilasters. This last stage is crowned with an ogee roof and a fancy weathervane.

C. Technical Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: Vestibule at front, stairs left and right to balconies; remainder of church is a large auditorium.
2. Stairways: Simple, three-run stairs with well; open string; plain square newel and balusters; scrolls to steps.
3. Flooring: Wide board floors.
4. Wall and ceiling finish: White painted plaster. Ceiling has large, low circular dome with chandelier.
5. Doorways and doors: Simple paneled doors.
6. Decorative features and trim: Balcony around three sides of church with paneled railing; plain circular columns with modified lotus-leaf capitals support balcony; giant circular columns with modified Ionic capitals and free square entablatures extend to ceiling; notable raised pulpit, restored 1937; box pews, restored 1937; inside louvered shutters.
7. Lighting: Electric; handsome chandelier in church.
8. Heating: Stoves first used in 1818.

D. Site:

1. Orientation and general setting: Building faces west on village green. Set in quiet country village, with trees and grass. Cemetery to one side.
2. Enclosures: Notable wooden fence to cemetery with pickets, square posts topped by urns.